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Analysis of the Causes of Entrepreneurs ' Anxiety in the Digital Age and Research on Mindfulness Relief Programs

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ABSTRACT

In the digital era, although big data and intelligent technologies provide entrepreneurial activities with resource support and efficiency gains, they have also induced multiple stressors-including information overload, social comparison, technological iteration uncertainty, and role conflict-leading to a widespread prevalence of anxiety among entrepreneurs, especially young entrepreneurs. This "entrepreneurial anxiety" carries both pathological risks and moderate adaptive value; however, excessively high levels of anxiety seriously hinder innovation performance and firm survival. Addressing the pain point that traditional psychological intervention models struggle to adapt to entrepreneurs' high-intensity, fragmented work rhythms, this study, grounded in mindfulness intervention theory, proposes a "micro-mindfulness module" design scheme tailored to the characteristics of digital-age entrepreneurs. The scheme comprises five modules: morning activation, breath anchoring during work breaks, midday mini-rest, emotional first aid for high-pressure scenarios, and evening closing review-aiming to help entrepreneurs reduce anxiety levels and enhance psychological resilience and decision-making quality through short-duration, high-frequency psychological regulation training. Through analysis of typical case scenarios, the study verifies the scheme's practical effectiveness in helping entrepreneurs establish psychological boundaries, restore cognitive resources, and improve sleep quality, thereby providing a new theoretical perspective and intervention pathway for promoting the healthy development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

KEYWORDS

Digital Era; Entrepreneurial Anxiety; Mindfulness Intervention; Psychological Resilience; Innovation Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies is fundamentally transforming opportunity recognition, resource integration, and decision-making in entrepreneurial activities. Emerging technologies, including big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms, have reshaped information acquisition and uncertainty management in entrepreneurship, enabling entrepreneurs to identify market opportunities, obtain customer feedback, and adapt their business models more efficiently [1]. However, while digitalization improves entrepreneurial efficiency and expands opportunities, it may also generate information overload, constant connectivity, increasingly visible competition, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Existing research suggests that information overload, social overload, and other psychological and behavioral stressors are closely associated with social media fatigue [2]. The digital entrepreneurial environment therefore presents both opportunities and challenges: technological progress can improve the efficiency of entrepreneurial

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resource allocation while simultaneously increasing information-processing demands, emotional regulation difficulties, and decision-making pressure.

Entrepreneurial activities typically take place under conditions of resource constraints, substantial uncertainty, and concentrated responsibility for outcomes. Entrepreneurs are required to manage multiple responsibilities, including financing, product development, team management, and market expansion, while continuously making consequential decisions based on incomplete information. Time pressure, role conflict, financial risk, and the close connection between venture outcomes and personal identity may all affect entrepreneurs' mental health. In a systematic review of 144 empirical studies, Stephan [3] identified entrepreneurs' mental health and well-being as important factors in understanding entrepreneurial motivation, decision-making, and action. A subsequent meta-analysis demonstrated that entrepreneurship can provide positive experiences, such as autonomy, work satisfaction, and a sense of meaning, while also undermining mental health through persistent stress and uncertainty [4]. Accordingly, entrepreneurship research should move beyond venture performance and survival to incorporate entrepreneurs' emotional experiences and psychological adaptation into its analytical framework.

Among the psychological experiences associated with entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial anxiety warrants particular attention. Entrepreneurial anxiety refers to feelings of tension, worry, self-doubt, and anticipation of adverse outcomes arising from uncertainty surrounding entrepreneurial goals, decisions, and potential venture outcomes [5]. Digital environments may intensify these emotional responses. On the one hand, digital platforms enable entrepreneurs to access market information, customer evaluations, and competitors' activities in real time. On the other hand, continuous information exposure and increasingly visible performance comparisons may increase psychological strain. A systematic review and meta-analysis of social comparison research found significant associations between social comparison evaluations and mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depression [6]. In addition, social media-related stressors and information overload may further contribute to psychological fatigue [2]. Entrepreneurial anxiety in the digital era may therefore emerge from the combined influence of technological pressure, competitive comparison, decision uncertainty, and role conflict rather than from a single source of stress.

Importantly, entrepreneurial anxiety is not necessarily dysfunctional in every circumstance. Traditional research on negative emotions has often emphasized the potential detrimental effects of anxiety on mental health and behavioral performance. However, stress and anxiety may operate through more complex mechanisms in entrepreneurial settings. Lerman et al. [7] distinguished challenge stressors from hindrance stressors and demonstrated that entrepreneurial stress has heterogeneous implications for entrepreneurs' well-being and performance. Thus, the optimal psychological state for entrepreneurs may not necessarily involve the complete elimination of anxiety, but rather the maintenance of sufficient vigilance without allowing excessive anxiety to disrupt information processing, emotional regulation, and decision-making. Consistent with this perspective, Zhu et al. [5] found that entrepreneurs could improve their pitch performance by reappraising anxiety as a reflection of their passion for the venture. These findings suggest that entrepreneurial anxiety may involve both risk-related consequences and potential adaptive value. Rather than simply seeking to reduce anxiety, helping entrepreneurs recognize, accept, and regulate anxiety within a relatively adaptive range may offer important theoretical and practical benefits.

Mindfulness provides a promising theoretical foundation for regulating entrepreneurial anxiety. Mindfulness is generally understood as the intentional direction of attention toward present-moment experiences, accompanied by an open, accepting, and nonjudgmental awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. An integrative review in organizational research identified associations between mindfulness and attentional regulation, emotional management, self-regulation, and various workplace behaviors [8]. Furthermore, a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials of workplace mindfulness training found beneficial effects on stress, anxiety, and psychological distress [9]. Through these mechanisms, mindfulness may help

entrepreneurs reduce automatic emotional reactions and rumination while strengthening their awareness and acceptance of anxiety, thereby facilitating more flexible cognitive appraisal and decision-making.

The application of mindfulness in entrepreneurship has also received increasing empirical attention. van Gelderen et al. [10] examined the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and entrepreneurial action, finding that this relationship was context-dependent and influenced by entrepreneurial experience. Engel et al. [11] further demonstrated experimentally that brief loving-kindness meditation could increase entrepreneurs' self-compassion and reduce fear reactivity when they encountered threatening venture obstacles. These findings provide direct evidence for the potential application of mindfulness to entrepreneurs' psychological regulation. They also suggest that mindfulness may be valuable not only for alleviating negative emotions but also for enhancing self-acceptance and improving responses to entrepreneurial obstacles.

Nevertheless, an important research opportunity remains in aligning existing interventions with entrepreneurs' actual working patterns. Many structured mindfulness programs require relatively fixed periods of practice, whereas entrepreneurial work is often fragmented, unpredictable, decision-intensive, and characterized by frequent attentional switching. For student entrepreneurs and early-stage founders, the time demands of conventional training may reduce participation and adherence. Although existing research has demonstrated the potential value of brief meditation for emotional regulation among entrepreneurs [11], further systematic investigation is needed to determine how mindfulness can be developed into micro-mindfulness interventions that can be embedded into entrepreneurial workflows and adapted to fragmented working conditions.

Against this background, the present study focuses on entrepreneurial anxiety in the digital era and investigates a micro-mindfulness intervention tailored to entrepreneurs' fragmented work patterns. Building on the distinction between the risk-related and potentially adaptive properties of entrepreneurial anxiety, the study will examine the principal sources and manifestations of anxiety in digital entrepreneurial environments and investigate its relationships with entrepreneurial decision-making, innovative behavior, and psychological resilience. On this basis, a micro-mindfulness intervention incorporating brief breathing awareness, affect labeling, cognitive defusion, self-compassion, and mindful pauses before decision-making will be developed. The study aims to extend the intervention objective from simply "reducing anxiety" to "optimizing anxiety regulation"-that is, reducing excessive anxiety and rumination while recognizing the potentially adaptive function of moderate vigilance.

This study is expected to make theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it situates entrepreneurial anxiety within the context of digital entrepreneurship and seeks to deepen understanding of its functions by considering both its potential risks and adaptive value. By incorporating fragmented working patterns into mindfulness intervention design, the study also seeks to extend mindfulness research to occupational contexts characterized by high uncertainty and cognitive demands. Practically, the study aims to develop a time-efficient psychological regulation approach that can be readily integrated into entrepreneurs' daily activities. The proposed intervention may inform efforts to improve entrepreneurs' emotional regulation, psychological resilience, and decision quality, while providing guidance for mental health services in university entrepreneurship education, business incubators, and broader entrepreneurial support systems.

2. ENTREPRENEURIAL ANXIETY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: ANTECEDENTS AND MICRO-MINDFULNESS INTERVENTION DESIGN

2.1 Antecedents of Entrepreneurial Anxiety in the Digital Era

Based on the literature review and textual analysis, this study identifies four major antecedents of entrepreneurial anxiety in the digital era: information overload, social comparison, technological and decision uncertainty, and role conflict.

2.1.1 Information Overload: From Digital Empowerment to Cognitive Burden

Digital technologies substantially enhance entrepreneurs' access to market information, customer feedback, and industry trends. However, the rapid growth of fragmented, redundant, and sometimes contradictory information may exceed individuals' limited attentional and cognitive capacities. Entrepreneurs are often required to remain continuously alert to market signals, emerging technologies, competitor activities, and potential risks. Such persistent information monitoring increases cognitive load and consumes psychological resources, gradually transforming digital empowerment into a source of psychological burden.

2.1.2 Social Comparison: Visibility and Perceived Competitive Pressure

Digital platforms make entrepreneurial achievements increasingly visible and comparable. Entrepreneurs are frequently exposed to highly selective representations of others' successes while having limited access to their failures, setbacks, and everyday struggles. This asymmetry may produce distorted upward social comparison, leading individuals to evaluate their own performance against the highly curated achievements of peers.At the same time, continuous exposure to competitors' progress can create a perceived sense of being left behind. Such competitive pressure may encourage excessive benchmarking, imitation, and self-doubt, thereby intensifying anxiety and emotional exhaustion.

2.1.3 Technological and Decision Uncertainty

Rapid technological change increases uncertainty regarding the sustainability of existing products, business models, and competitive advantages. Entrepreneurs must therefore respond not only to current operational challenges but also to the possibility that emerging technologies may quickly disrupt their markets.

This uncertainty is further amplified by the high frequency of entrepreneurial decision-making. Digital markets require rapid responses, while many decisions involve incomplete information, substantial opportunity costs, and uncertain outcomes. Persistent exposure to high-stakes decisions can deplete cognitive and emotional resources, thereby increasing entrepreneurial anxiety.

2.1.4 Role Conflict and Blurred Work – Life Boundaries

Entrepreneurs typically perform multiple roles simultaneously, including founder, manager, salesperson, strategist, and technical specialist. Digital connectivity further intensifies these role demands by allowing work-related communication and decision-making to occur at virtually any time and place.Although constant connectivity increases operational flexibility, it also creates an "always-on" work environment in which psychological detachment from work becomes difficult. Frequent role switching and blurred work–life boundaries reduce opportunities for recovery and sustain psychological activation beyond formal working hours. Over time, this persistent depletion of psychological resources may contribute to the accumulation of anxiety.

2.2 Design of a Micro-Mindfulness Intervention

To address the fragmented, high-intensity, and uncertainty-driven nature of entrepreneurial work, this study proposes a micro-mindfulness intervention composed of five brief modules embedded in typical

daily entrepreneurial scenarios. Rather than requiring extended formal meditation, the intervention emphasizes short, context-sensitive practices that facilitate emotional regulation and psychological recovery throughout the working day.

Module 1: Morning Mindful Activation (3 minutes).

Before beginning work, entrepreneurs engage in brief breathing awareness and body scanning. The purpose is to establish attentional stability and a clear psychological transition into the working day. Its primary function is activation.

Module 2: Breathing Anchor Between Tasks (2 minutes).

During transitions between meetings or work tasks, entrepreneurs briefly redirect attention to the breath. This practice reduces residual cognitive activation from previous tasks and facilitates attentional reorientation. Its primary function is resetting.

Module 3: Midday Mindful Recovery (10 minutes).

During the lunch break, entrepreneurs undertake a short mindfulness practice combining breathing awareness and body scanning. The purpose is to reduce accumulated cognitive and emotional fatigue and restore psychological resources for subsequent work. Its primary function is recovery.

Module 4: High-Pressure Emotional First Aid (5 minutes).

When facing crises, unexpected setbacks, or intense emotional reactions, entrepreneurs pause to observe and acknowledge their current emotional state without immediate judgment or impulsive action. This module aims to reduce emotional reactivity and preserve decision quality under pressure. Its primary function is stabilization .

Module 5: Evening Mindful Closure (8 minutes).

At the end of the working day, entrepreneurs engage in a brief reflective mindfulness practice to acknowledge the day's experiences and intentionally disengage from work-related thoughts. This practice creates a psychological boundary between the entrepreneurial role and personal life. Its primary function is closure.

Taken together, these five modules form a time-sensitive intervention sequence of activation–resetting–recovery–stabilization–closure. The proposed design embeds mindfulness into naturally occurring transition points across the entrepreneurial workday, thereby reducing the time burden associated with conventional mindfulness programs. Conceptually, the intervention is intended not to eliminate entrepreneurial anxiety completely, but to reduce excessive cognitive and emotional activation, strengthen emotion regulation, facilitate psychological recovery, and support more adaptive decision-making in highly uncertain digital entrepreneurial environments.

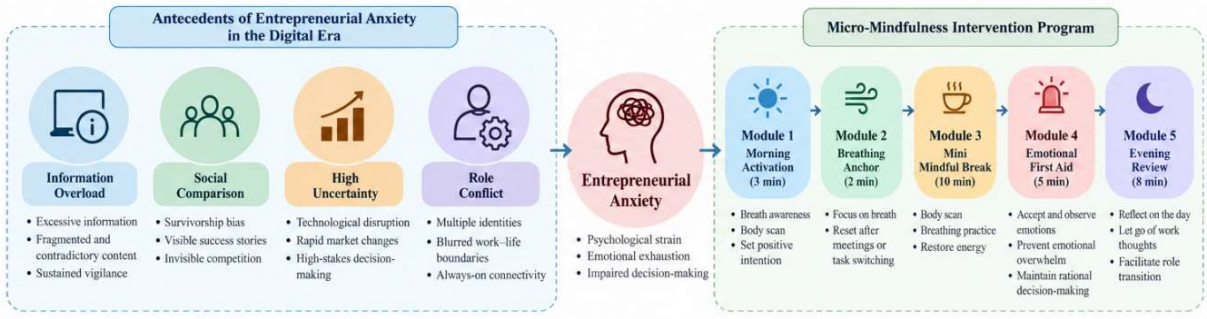

Figure 1. Antecedents of entrepreneurial anxiety in the digital era and the micro-mindfulness intervention program

3 CONCLUSION

(1) Entrepreneurial anxiety in the digital era is driven by multiple interacting stressors rather than a single source. Information overload, social comparison, technological and decision uncertainty, and role conflict jointly increase entrepreneurs' cognitive and emotional burdens, making anxiety a structural psychological challenge in digitally mediated entrepreneurial environments.

(2) Entrepreneurial anxiety should not be regarded as entirely dysfunctional. While excessive anxiety may impair emotional regulation, psychological well-being, and decision quality, a moderate level of anxiety may enhance vigilance and sensitivity to risk. Therefore, effective intervention should focus not merely on reducing anxiety, but on regulating it within an adaptive range.

(3) Micro-mindfulness provides a context-sensitive approach to managing entrepreneurial anxiety. By embedding brief mindfulness practices into key transition points throughout the entrepreneurial workday, the proposed intervention can support emotional stabilization, psychological recovery, attentional regulation, and work-life detachment while remaining compatible with entrepreneurs' fragmented and high-intensity working patterns.

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